



RED IMPORTED FIRE ANT ALERT!



Facts about Red Imported Fire Ants

Red Imported Fire Ants are tiny, but aggressive, reddish-brown ants with a fierce sting. First identified in Southern California in 1997, the insects have been reported in eight counties: Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, Riverside, San Diego, and in agricultural areas of Fresno, Madera, and Stanislaus. Fire Ants nest in the ground and in the walls of homes and will attack animals and people that disturb their mounds. This fact sheet provides you with more information about fire ants, how to report an infestation, and what to do if you are stung.

Where do fire ants live?

Fire ants build nests just about anywhere they can find moisture – lawns, gardens, woodpiles, fields, and parks. The insect has also been known to build colonies in electrical boxes and the walls of homes and other dwellings. The mounds usually are about 18 inches across and resemble large gopher mounds or look like crumbly earth with small holes.

Why are fire ants a threat?

Fire ants typically attack when their nest is disturbed. When attacking, hundreds of fire ants swarm within a matter of seconds and inflict painful stings that feel like pokes from a hot needle. Each sting itches and burns and leaves a blister-like sore that could become infected if not treated carefully.

Red Imported Fire Ants are especially dangerous to small children, the elderly, pets, and wildlife. In fact, swarms of fire ants have been known to kill small animals and even people. Some people, maybe two out of 100, are allergic to fire ant venom, and if stung can experience difficulty breathing and other life-threatening reactions.

What should I do if I find fire ants?

It's difficult to tell the difference between Red Imported Fire Ants and other ants common in California. If you think you've found a fire ant mound or nest, don't disturb it! Instead, call the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) at **1-888-4FIREANT (1-888-434-7326)**. They will ask you questions to determine whether you have discovered a fire ant infestation and, at no charge, will send an expert to check it and, if necessary, treat it. Don't try to kill the ants or destroy the nest yourself!

What should I do if I am stung by fire ants?

For most people, fire ant stings are painful but not dangerous. Here are some tips:

- Wash the stings with soap and warm water to disinfect the area.
- Be careful not to scratch the blister that forms within a day or so of the sting or it could become infected.
- If you experience symptoms such as dizziness, nausea, sweating, swelling of the affected area, headache or shortness of breath, call your doctor or seek medical attention immediately. You may be having an allergic reaction to the fire ant venom.



California Department of Food and Agriculture
www.cdfa.ca.gov/rifa

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